



A path for every student. A plan for every future.™

33 Arch Street, Suite 2100
Boston, MA 02110
800.999.9080

asa.org

American Student Assistance and Bellwether Education Partners Release New State-by-State Analysis of Work-based Learning Policy

BOSTON – March 3, 2021 – A new report released today from the national nonprofit American Student Assistance[®] ([ASA](http://asa.org)) and Bellwether Education Partners analyzes states' progress in adopting and enacting work-based learning policies for students in middle and high school. The report, *Working to Learn and Learning to Work*, evaluates each state on student access to career preparation programs such as internships, pre-apprenticeships, and cooperative education programs and helps states understand strengths and areas for growth and improvement.

“High-quality, work-based learning programs are a win-win for all education stakeholders from students and families to employers and state leaders,” said **Jean Eddy, ASA President and CEO**. “Work-based learning is essential to helping young people develop employability and technical skills that can help them succeed beyond high school and is critical to building strong workforce and talent pipelines. We are encouraged by the many states that have already implemented such policies and hope to see more states create sustainable work-based learning programs.”

To categorize the quality of work-based learning policies and programs in each state, ASA and Bellwether developed a comprehensive rubric consisting of 15 criteria organized into six categories:

- Definition of work-based learning
- Program implementation
- Sustainable funding
- Infrastructure support
- Equitable student access and eligibility
- Measured quality and accountability

After an initial landscape analysis of state-level work-based learning resources, Bellwether conducted interviews with representatives from 43 states and Washington, D.C. to delve deeper into the findings and determine the health of each state's related policies and programs.

Findings from the review surfaced six key themes across state work-based learning policies:

- States' policies are either centralized or decentralized in implementation structure.
- Policies have broad eligibility requirements, but few ensure equitable access.
- Few states have explicit policies or programs to support high-need students.
- Federal workforce funding is most frequently used to support high school programs, while a small number of states have dedicated funding, incentives, or other infrastructure supports to promote work-based learning.
- Communicating available opportunities to students needs to be improved.
- States need to set quality and accountability standards and develop data systems to support intervention and improvement.

“There's no one-size-fits all approach to these programs, and this analysis allows policy leaders to identify the programmatic elements and support structures that need further development in their

own state,” said **Jennifer O’Neal Schiess, Bellwether Education Partners**. “As the national conversation around high-quality, work-based learning continues to grow, understanding the policy frameworks that produce meaningful results will be essential to creating, expanding and improving work-based learning opportunities for all students.”

The report also illustrates how the criteria for programs are both evaluated and successfully practiced through case studies. For example, Massachusetts’ green ratings for infrastructure communications support comes from the state’s [Work-Based Learning Plan](#), which is a system focused on identifying and assessing the skills developed through work-based learning experiences. The plan requires that programs include a job description, details of the employability and technical skills developed through the program and a performance review.

While neither the research nor the rubric account for the impact of COVID-19 and the shift to virtual work-based learning opportunities that many states have developed over the last year, ASA and Bellwether acknowledge that these virtual programs have the potential to expand access to high-quality programs and deserve further research and analysis.

ASA is currently developing resources for states to help support the expansion of these policies and programs.

To download a copy of the report, visit www.asa.org/research-study/working-to-learn-and-learning-to-work/.

About American Student Assistance® (ASA)

American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a national nonprofit committed to helping kids know themselves, know their options, and make informed choices to achieve their education and career goals. ASA® has a 60-year legacy of working directly with students to increase their access to higher education through loans and financial education. ASA has turned its experience into impactful solutions for students in grades 6-12 to help them pursue their dreams. To learn more about ASA, visit www.asa.org/about-us

About Bellwether Education Partners

Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children. We do this by helping education organizations accelerate their impact and by working to improve policy and practice.

Media Contact

Judy Goldstein
Vice President of Strategic Planning & Partnerships, ASA
jgoldstein@asa.org